

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 11 March 2021

**Question by Rob Thomas to Richard Long,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

I'm grateful for the support given by Kent County Council to school children, and their families, in light of the difficulties we've all faced during the global pandemic not least of all the 31,000 families who received free school meal support over the Christmas holidays. I understand KCC will be trialling a programme of summer schools to prevent Summer Learning Loss working with children in poverty to ensure that their academic attainment does not suffer during the holidays as perhaps has happened historically – Members may welcome the fact that this programme is being led by Rob Comber from CYPE who won the LGA Challenge award in 2019 for another excellent education project.

Noting the above context and the good work that has already been undertaken, what lessons can Kent County Council learn from the challenges and experiences of the global pandemic that may also help ensure that school children across Kent can have the best education possible irrespective of their family's circumstances?

Answer

Learning from the challenges and experiences of the global pandemic

While schools have worked to understand and measure gaps during the delivery of remote learning during the pandemic, these cannot be fully understood until teachers have had time to undertake rounded assessment with students back in classrooms. Students only returned to classroom settings on 8th March and we may therefore not know the full extent of the problem for some time; however, understanding the challenges will be an ongoing focus for schools and the County Council over the next months and years. Key areas of focus will include (but are not limited to) identifying issues around stamina and the ability of children and young people to engage for long periods of time, understanding the gaps in learning and identifying the support that needs to be put in place to restore both mental and physical health.

With regards to the Project which Rob Comber is leading, the first summer school within the project is due to launch this Summer, 2021. The project takes on key evidence-based initiatives such as a strong focus on literacy, using youth mentors and training in mental health first aid. An evaluation of the initial summer school will be completed in September.

I therefore return to my earlier point that, whatever the size and nature of the gaps identified, an evidence informed response is needed in order to make better informed decisions around what approach ought to be taken. Schools need to build strong relationships, restore and embed good school practices and must be able to respond appropriately to the identified needs of our children and young people.

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**Question by Rob Bird to Richard Long,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

The KCC Select Committee on grammar schools and social mobility reported back in 2016. It made sixteen valuable recommendations which were endorsed by the Council. Recommendation 8 urged KCC to monitor and challenge the proportion of pupils supported by the Pupil Premium who go on to grammar school.

At the time of the report, 6.3% of pupils attending grammar schools in Kent were in receipt of Pupil Premium, compared to 26.9% in non-selective Kent secondary schools. The figure was much starker in some of Kent's 'super-selective' grammar schools.

There is little evidence that it has become any less difficult over the past 5 years for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to get into grammar schools. The figures in Kent are still stubbornly low, while last September, the 6 grammar schools within Birmingham's King Edward VI Foundation increased the percentage of places set aside for children eligible for the Pupil Premium from 20% to 25%.

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on progress with Recommendation 8 of the Select Committee? In providing his answer, can the Cabinet Member evidence KCC's progress by clarifying how many children have been placed in Kent grammar schools as a result of Pupil Premium criteria in grammar schools' Admissions Codes, highlighting any identified impact of COVID-19 on this situation?

Answer

When the Select Committee on Grammar Schools and Social Mobility made its recommendations in 2016, only three Kent Grammar schools included or proposed including priority for Pupil Premium (PP) or Free School Meal eligible (FSM) pupils in their oversubscription criteria. Since then, Officers have ensured that 31 of the 32 Kent Grammar schools now include or propose to include PP/FSM priority in their admission arrangements. Officers will continue to discuss the recommendation with Dane Court Grammar, which will remain the only school to offer no specific priority.

Primary schools are reminded each year of the importance of ensuring that able FSM/PP pupils are encouraged to register for the Kent Test, and where appropriate, referred to the Head Teacher Assessment Panels for consideration if they do not secure an automatic selective assessment on test scores alone. Panel Chairs are reminded to invite their panels to give particular attention to PP/FSM referrals.

Following the Select Committee recommendations, School Improvement Advisers used school data sets to challenge attainment and rates of progress for all pupils but in particular disadvantaged SEND and PP. Kent data sets have been used to review the progress and profile of disadvantaged learners in each school. Where schools demonstrated wide achievement gaps they were offered full Pupil Premium reviews, to

help them unpick their PP data, review their PP spending and develop an action plan to target higher achievement by mitigating barriers. Dissemination of effective practice was achieved through offers of school to school support, adviser input and signposting best practice during visits and headteacher briefings. A pupil premium toolkit was developed and rolled out to schools and has since been updated twice alongside a PP online audit tool.

Between 2015 and 2019 the proportion of FSM eligible pupils in Kent Grammar schools has increased by 38%, compared to a 28.9% increase in High Schools and 33.8% increase in Wide Ability schools, which suggests that the actions taken have helped improve the representation of disadvantaged pupils in Kent Grammar schools.

While early data suggested that COVID-19 had a minimal impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils through the selective process, analysis of National Offer Day intake shows a 4.2% reduction in the proportion of FSM eligible pupils who secured a place at a Kent Grammar school. This means that of the 1419 FSM pupils that took the Kent Test, 339 were offered a place at a Kent Grammar school. However, until there is data measuring the educational outcomes for all children following lockdown, it would be premature to reach any conclusions about the significance of the reduction in numbers of PP/FSM pupils qualifying for admission to grammar school on National Offer Day. Officers will continue to monitor these trends, to inform planning for the autumn term and forthcoming selective process.

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Thursday 11 March 2021

**Question by Dara Farrell to Peter Oakford,
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for
Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

What steps are being considered to close next year's budget gap?

Answer

It is too early to say what next year's budget gap will be. The outlook for the medium term is still highly uncertain and we do not have provisional figures for future years. There is still significant uncertainty about the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and how this might affect future tax yields or spending demands. The Budget report to County Council set out the medium term outlook which identified a potential gap ranging from £20m to £120m which shows just how uncertain the medium term outlook is. Over the next few months we will update our assumptions to help inform the steps we will need to take to address any budget gap there may be in 2022-23. We will ensure the steps we take continue to protect as far as possible our essential services and we will make prudent financial plans for the medium term that maintain and improve the Council's financial resilience. We have demonstrated this over the last 20 years through our delivery of a balanced or surplus outturn.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 11 March 2021

**Question by Trudy Dean to Clair Bell,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

The decision to award the Universal Wellbeing Services for older people in West Kent to 'Involve', particularly without Dementia Support in place until April 2022, has had the effect of potentially removing one third of funding from local Age UK branches in Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks and West Kent. Without this funding, they are threatened with imminent closure. It is alarming that a contract that could cost KCC just under £5m over 5 years could fail to safeguard such critical services.

In the light of the briefing issued on 17th February, can the Cabinet Member please update Members on the situation regarding transitional funding and any additional financial packages to enable services to older people in West Kent, without wholesale loss of Age UK branches and the valuable work they do in our communities, including consideration of relevant risks relating to the potential loss of some voluntary services? In her reply will the Cabinet Member please clarify how any transitional funding or other arrangements will allow for continued service provision by the relevant VCS organisations up until June 2022.

Answer

We recognise and acknowledge that there are still ongoing conversations between Involve and the Age UKs to determine to what extent they will be included as delivery partners. We are also in dialogue with our key stakeholders in the CCG and Districts about the possible risks to those people in our local communities who are supported and what should happen if those services should stop due to the organisations not coming to an agreement of working together.

Along with the financial support provided to the Age UKs through the COVID-19 pandemic, KCC has offered a financial transition package based on a proposal we asked each of the Age UKs to submit for us to consider. In the proposal we asked them to set out their transition plans until the end of June 2021, when we are hoping COVID-19 restrictions will have eased enough to allow them to resume activities that will allow income streams to start again. We have asked for them to indicate what they intend to provide in terms of services during this period, how they intend to transform moving into the new funding era and what funding would be required to support them through this period.

All three West Kent Age UKs submitted proposals for transitional and Dementia Support Service funding and will be supported. This allows some time for the current services to adapt and the new services to build up, and the dementia support services to continue to March 2022. We recognise that this means there will be a different offer for older people in the future and may not mean the continuation of all the services previously delivered by Age UK. However, the future offer being developed by Involve (and their partners) is broader and more varied and should allow older people more choice of activity to engage in. The future offer should also be adaptable to cater for what people would like to engage in and to meet people's needs.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 11 March 2021

Question by Bryan Sweetland to Michael Payne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Last Wednesday, it was reported that 25 illegally parked HGVs were clamped in Kent and since 11th January over 1,300 have been clamped. However, many parts of Kent continue to suffer from HGVs parking in unsuitable and dangerous locations including in my division of Gravesham Rural.

HGVs often cause damage to property and country lanes and distress to local residents. It is clear that HGV clamping has been successful in reducing the number parking in inappropriate (now illegal) locations in seven areas in Kent.

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that the clamping of illegally parked HGVs should be extended to include every part of Kent as soon as possible and what steps is he taking to ensure that this happens?

Answer

Thank you, Mr. Sweetland for your question.

The powers permitted by the Department for Transport for the operation of the HGV Clamping Scheme in Kent were granted on the agreement that they would run from the 1st January 2021 for a limited period of 6 months. They apply only within the districts and boroughs of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, Maidstone, Swale and Thanet, in support of the wider traffic management plans implemented in the county following the end of the EU exit transition period.

Kent County Council sympathises with residents across the county who have suffered from the negative impacts that inappropriate or illegal HGV parking can cause. However, we also recognise the role that the industry plays in supporting both the local and national economy, as well as the need for drivers to be able to take their statutory short break. That is why the powers have been used in a targeted way and where illegal longer stay parking has been encountered. It should be said that Kent County Council wishes to continue working with both the government and the freight industry in addressing this issue.

It must be noted that the HGV Clamping Scheme in Kent is a temporary measure. However, please be assured that I shall be using the positive evidence from this trial to seek to extend the scheme both in duration and location with the aim that this Scheme should cover the entire County.

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Thursday 11 March 2021

Question by Ida Linfield to Clair Bell,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Can the Cabinet Member commit today to protecting the total level of existing funding schemes currently available for local Age UKs in the Canterbury District and so prevent any possible closures when the Universal Wellbeing Service contract is awarded in the area?

Answer

The process of moving from historic grants to strategic contracts was never intended to create huge instability in the voluntary sector. The message from KCC throughout the process remains one of supporting voluntary sector partners to work together to deliver the future Wellbeing services. The process to award contracts is a fair and transparent one simplified wherever possible in recognition of the voluntary sector. The Council has taken steps to recognise the impact of the COVID pandemic and has paused the programme twice because of it. The Council has also built in steps and questions to ensure what organisations have done and learned is taken forward.

KCC has supported the voluntary sector with significant financial support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in recognition of the important work they do for local communities and vulnerable people.

The remaining 6 contracts (including Canterbury) for Wellbeing (Dementia, Universal, Physical Disability) will be procured through 2021. Given the timings and the pause we have had because of COVID – there is not enough time now for the contracts to start before April 2022.

To ensure maximum engagement with our provider market and to ensure sufficient capacity to complete the procurements, we will be spacing the contracts out across the year and not undertaking them all at one time. The start of the procurement process will be dictated by the relaxation of the COVID restrictions.

Whilst we recognise the value of organisations like Age UK in local communities, the Council cannot be seen to be supporting organisations to the detriment of another through a procurement process. The funding for the contract that covers the Canterbury District will include the ASC grant funding that currently is given to all the local organisations. It would be unfair to treat the Age UKs differently, and the Council does not have the funds available to in essence offer duplicate funding to ensure the Age UKs continue to be funded, while awarding additional contracts. Maximising the Kent pound to ensure as much money as possible goes into delivering front line services is a key principle of all our commissioning intentions. Council officers have worked with and supported local organisations, including the Age UKs, in order to get them working in partnership, sharing resources and ways of working to ensure that the money invested by KCC gets to front

line support services. Organisations have also been involved in the process all the way through, co-producing the specification and are fully engaged and aware of the change process and what is expected. Therefore, the Council has encouraged the Age UKs to build partnerships to enable them to respond to the requirements of the procurement process.